



Audit & Standards Committee Report

Report of: Mark Bennett, Director of HR and Customer Services

Date: 21 October 2021

Subject: Customer Services Contact Centre Performance

Author of Report: Paul Taylor, Head of Customer Services

Summary:

This report provides an overview of 2021-22 year to date performance for Customer Services Contact Centre. The report identifies issues that affect performance and identifies future developments and areas for improvement.

The report is presented by the Director of HR and Customer Services who is responsible for Customer Services.

Recommendations:

The Audit & Standards Committee is asked to consider the report in order to provide its view on the future performance of service, the improvements proposed, and the issues raised.

Background Papers:

None

Category of Report: OPEN

Statutory and Council Policy Checklist

Financial Implications
Legal Implications

Equality of Opportunity Implications
NO
Tackling Health Inequalities Implications
NO
Human rights Implications
NO:
Environmental and Sustainability implications
NO
Economic impact
NO
Community safety implications
NO
Human resources implications
NO
Property implications
NO
Area(s) affected
None
Relevant Cabinet Portfolio Lead
Cabinet Member for Finance, Resources & Governance
Relevant Scrutiny Committee if decision called in
Not applicable
Is the item a matter which is reserved for approval by the City Council?
NO
Press release
NO

Contact Centre Performance Q1 & Q2 2021-22

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1.0 INTRODUCTION

- 1.1 The Council's Corporate Contact Centre takes telephone enquiries for customers for the following services:
- Council Housing
 - Council Housing Repairs
 - Revenues and Benefits
 - Corporate – comprising 17 Services
 - Out of Hours – comprising Emergency Repairs, Homeless, Children's, Adult's, Social Services

2.0 SUMMARY

- 2.1 This report provides an overview of year-to-date performance for Q1 & Q2 2021–22 and issues impacting upon performance.
- 2.2 The report identifies future developments and areas for improvement in performance.

3.0 PERFORMANCE OVERVIEW Q2 2021-22

- 3.1 The service has a Key Performance Indicator to answer 85% of all calls offered. Year to date performance by service area is shown in the tables below

REVENUES AND BENEFITS

	Offered	Answered	% Answered	Waiting time (M:S)	Handling time (M:S)
Q1	31993	21045	66%	14:39	8:14
Q2	41773	17650	42%	56:56	9:49
October	4079	2110	52%	42:15	9:07

Revenues and Benefits Service impacted by a mailing to residents – 77000 letters regarding failed Direct Debits. In addition to this, several thousand payment reminder and final notices letters were sent weekly

CORPORATE

	Offered	Answered	% Answered	Waiting time	Handling time
Q1	50125	34736	69%	7:52	6:05
Q2	51435	31437	61%	15:47	6:47
October	4802	3972	83%	4:38	5:55

Seasonal pressures include:

- Parking permits - overlapping student years
- School holiday free school meals letters sent, some with erroneous voucher codes.
- Increased Register Office demand for ceremonies
- Pest Control requests
- Elections Annual Canvas

COUNCIL HOUSING

	Offered	Answered	% Answered	Waiting time	Handling time
Q1	54771	33953	62%	13:46	5:40
Q2	46909	36498	78%	11:46	5:35
October	5110	4468	87%	6:25	4:54

Slight reduction in demand whilst increasing percentage answered. Significant rent calls peaking on Mondays and Fridays. Telephony issues persist when referring to back offices - Teams hunt groups: calls are cancelled rather than forwarded if staff are unavailable, and the Storm to Teams telephony issue meant request details had to be sent electronically rather than a call transfer.

COUNCIL HOUSING REPAIRS

	Offered	Answered	% Answered	Waiting time	Handling time
Q1	75547	47522	63%	14:47	6:56
Q2	62079	38634	62%	29:43	7:19
October	7320	4706	64%	35:58	7:23

Demand steadily reduced through July, plateaued in August and through September, excepting Gas Servicing calls: appointment letters arrived after the appointment date (postal issue). Issues contacting some Back Office teams. Chase calls 35% of all calls. Training for front and back-office teams on new Repairs system.

EMERGENCY OUT OF HOURS

	Offered	Answered	% Answered	Waiting time	Handling time
Q1	15,448	13,159	85%	03:23	05:24

Q2	14,470	12,079	83%	03:52	05:21
October	1,832	1,584	86%	03:17	05:05

Demand mirroring pre-covid seasonal patterns, however overall volumes higher (i.e. average of 2018-2019 and 2019-2020, compared to 2021-2022): homeless 216%, social care 142% and repairs 125%

3.2 Interventions by the service have stabilised performance and are starting to deliver improvements in the key indicators, apart from Revenues & Benefits, which continues to be challenging.

4.0 ISSUES IMPACTING PERFORMANCE

4.1 The service took responsibility for extra services and additional calls related to the support for residents during the pandemic such as:

- Provision of Free School Meals in holidays
- Winter hardship grants.

4.2 Like many other service sector organisations maintaining staffing levels has been challenging during the pandemic, this has led to capacity issues for the service, which in turn has increased waiting times for customers. 7 experienced Customer Services staff moved to the Council's Test, Track, and Isolate Team when this was created, as well as staff turnover and staff absence.

4.3 Training and recruitment has been challenging as staff and mentors adapt to hybrid working and the service has had to change established methods and adapt to new methods. Recruiting Agency staff was unsuccessful as the demand for temps outstripped supply.

4.4 "Back-Office" performance issues affect the number of calls and the handling time of calls received in the Contact Centre

- Although the Contact Centre now returned to full opening hours. Some back-office services are still not able to operate at full pre-covid service levels
- Difficulty contacting back-office colleagues for referrals is an issue, which leads to longer call handling times
- Upon reinstatement of services there were significant backlogs of Council Housing repairs – chase calls / appointments queries are circa 30% of call demand
- Housing Customer Records Management system does not integrate with OHMS system, this causes increased call handling times

4.5 Revenues and Benefits call-handling performance remains a significant challenge:

- Finance colleagues are catching up on post-pandemic billing, meaning we have a constantly high level of calls
- The Customer Services have 4 R&B vacancies, recruitment is underway but takes additional time due to the introduction of CRB checks for this cohort.

- 4.6 The new Customer Records Management system and the new Storm phone system were implemented at pace during the pandemic which interrupted a smooth transition opportunity. This has slowed down call-handlers as they learned new systems encountered some system implementation issues.

5.0 IMPROVEMENTS AND FUTURE DEVELOPMENTS

Improvements

- 5.1 The service takes a proactive approach, collaborating with colleagues in services who use the Contact Centre for customer contact, to better understand and mitigate cross-service issues that impact on call waiting times.
- 5.2 Recruitment to vacant posts is underway with successful applicants serving their notice. New recruits should join the service in November 21. To shorten recruitment timeframes the service has trialled different approaches to recruitment.
- 5.3 Training has been reviewed and refined to reduce the training period to 3 weeks from 6 weeks, enabling new staff to start call handling with their mentors sooner.
- 5.4 The Total Mobile system to order repairs will be rolled out to all Contact Centre staff, which will reduce handling time and therefore waiting time. If a trades person cannot get to their next appointment, the system will alert the Repairs Co-ordinator, they re-appoint it and let the tenant know. This should reduce chase calls. Additionally, it will be easier to train other Contact Centre staff who can help out during peak periods.
- 5.5 The weekend-working for Housing Repairs trial is extended to November, it is positively impacting on Monday's call volumes if the trend continues, the service will work with colleagues to extend.

Possible Future Developments

The following are currently being explored.

- 5.6 Extended opening hours will be considered, where back-office support can be secured.
- 5.7 Live Chat & Web Chat - Initiatives which will enhance customer experience and that may shift demand from telephony operations. Contact-handlers can deal with up to 4 enquiries at once.
- 5.8 Natural Language is available in the Storm telephony system – it is an automated voice-recognition system that interacts and automatically routes callers to the correct place without initially involving a call-handler. A pilot will commence with Housing Services.

- 5.9 Merge telephone queues. By cross-skilling staff and deploying them across more skill-sets enables the service to be more resilient and handle calls quicker.
- 5.10 Greater joining-up between Revenues and Benefits front and back-office will provide an opportunity to deal more effectively with spikes in calls.
- 5.11 Not all calls into the Council go through the Contact Centre. An exercise is underway to establish which numbers related to which service, and how customer interaction is delivered.

6.0 RECOMMENDATIONS

- 6.1 The Audit & Standards Committee is asked to consider the report in order to provide its view on the performance of the Contact Centre and the issues raised.

